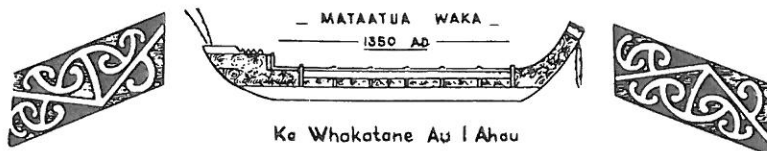


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AN OLD LADY PASSES.

A link in Opotiki's earliest history was severed on Monday with the passing of Mrs Kateruri (Gertrude) Matchitt whose age is reliably stated to be at least 106 years. Born in Opotiki over a century ago, Mrs Matchitt who was affectionately known to her many friends and relatives as "Ka," spent nearly all her life in this district and was over 30 years of age at the time of the murder of Rev. Carl Volkner in 1865, of whom she retained the most vivid memories. She was married to Colonel Gundy in Auckland, the witnesses to the wedding ceremony being Colonel Balnevis and Major von Tempsky.

Many of the vivid recollections which Ka retained were shared by Mr Ngakohu Pera [now also deceased, Ed.,] who related many interesting facts to a "News" reporter yesterday. Mr Pera recalled having visited the spot where von Tempsky was killed in Taranaki, and also the spot where Kereopa, the murderer of Rev. Volkner was hanged in New Plymouth [sic. Napier].

Recalling the legend of earliest Opotiki, handed down from generation to generation, Mr Pera told of the naming of Opotiki where Ka and her brothers had spent nearly all their days. According to early tradition, the Canoes of their ancestors came from Hawaiki, the voyagers bringing with them two tapu fish. When these early explorers arrived, they landed at Paerata Ridge where a spring of water was found just before the turnoff up Paerata Ridge. That spring, which still gives a good flow of water, was used for placing the two fish in, states old Maori legends. Here the fish were left while the Maoris came to camp at Pakowhai. In the morning the old chief asked his daughter to go to see O-potiki (the name of the fish). The daughter went to see the fish which came to the edge of the spring to receive food.

Upon her returning to Pakowhai, the old chief asked the girl about the fish and, upon being told that they were still alive, declared that he would change the name of the place from Pa-kowhai (which means a meeting place surrounded by kowhai trees - which were very plentiful here in the early days), to O-potiki, after the fish. The name Opotiki is now used by the Maori as a pet name for the last child in a family; and the legend was often told by Ka to her relatives in Opotiki.

Turning from legend to later happenings, Mr Ngakohu Pera said that Ka had vivid memories of the Rev. Volkner, because she accompanied him and Mrs Volkner to Auckland just before he returned to Opotiki to be murdered at the hands of the Hauhaus.

Mr Pera said that the reason for Kereopa's action in murdering Volkner had been related to Hon. F. Langstone, Minister of Lands, by Sir Apirana Ngata. During a visit by Mr Pera, Mr Jimmy Apanui and Mr Jimmy Edwards to Wellington on land complaints commission business Mr Langstone asked Mr Pera to tell the story of Kereopa, but Mr Pera nodded to Sir Apirana Ngata as he had so often told Ngata the story.

Ngata then told the story which led Kereopa to become so incense
Ngata's Perspective

At Te Kuiti, a preacher was holding a service in a church filled with Maoris, among whom was the wife of Kereopa and his two daughters. While the service was in progress, pakeha soldiers surrounded the church and took the minister out, shutting the Maoris in the church. They then set fire to the church burning to death all the Maoris, none of whom was able to escape.*

When Kereopa returned to Te Kuiti he learned the terrible story of what happened to his wife and daughters, and then swore terrible vengeance on any minister who might land in New Zealand. That was the story told by Sir Apirana Ngata to Hon. Frank Langstone, in the presence of Mr Pera, who had previously told Ngata the story.

When Ka went to Auckland with Rev. and Mrs Volkner and family, she warned them not to return to Opotiki on account of the unsettled state of affairs there. There were many Maoris from different parts who were stirring up trouble in Opotiki. However, Volkner returned without his wife in spite of the warning and was murdered shortly after his return, by the Hauhaus.

When Ka and her brothers heard that Volkner had returned, they

* With due respect to the late Sir Apirana Ngata and late Mr Pera, this is not as the official war historian, James Cowan, records it. According to Cowan, the battle with the British soldiers occurred at Rangiaowhia, near Te Awamutu - and not at Te Kuiti, on Sunday, 12 February 1864. A number of the rebel Maoris were attending divine service at the time, but that did not deter them from firing through the walls of the church when they discovered General Cameron's men in possession of the settlement.

The Maori inhabitants of Rangiaowhia also sniped the soldiers from their whares, the interiors of which were excavated a foot or two below ground level so that they were firing almost from floor level. But the walls of the whares were constructed of raupo which soon became flaming furnaces and those occupants who refused to surrender perished in this manner. The charred remains of soldiers who had been shot while attempting to enter the whares were also found in the ruins afterwards. And, as so often happens in the heat of battle, some non-combatant Maoris unfortunately perished and their remains were found too; including (according to all accounts) Kereopa's near relatives, as he was among the rebels at the time notwithstanding that, being a member of one of the ARAWA sub-tribes, he was not affected by the wars raging in Taranaki and Waikato.

To add fuel to this 'fire in the fern', Bishop Selwyn was in attendance with the advancing British forces in order to provide succour to the wounded of both sides, but his presence was interpreted by the rebels and their sympathisers as favouring the British and, especially, of his condoning an attack upon them while at worship on a Sunday. All these happenings gave Kereopa te Rau, already a "wild fellow", his excuse for venting his feelings against members of the Church of England, especially Rev. Volkner whom he had warned not to return from Auckland to his flock in Opotiki. The church at Rangiaowhia was not burned as claimed.

were afraid of what might happen and set sail in their own boat, the MERE, accompanied by some white sailors. The Hauhaus got hold of the white sailors and locked them up in a small house which stood where the Catholic Church now stands. When Ka and her brother, Tiwai, heard that the men were locked up, they went along and let them out while the Hauhaus were asleep. They took the sailors to their boat and sailed away, saving them from the massacre that was to have taken place on the following day.

Because of their rescue efforts, Ka and her brothers were granted by the Government, a piece of land beyond the Opotiki aerodrome, including a large part of the river flat. They were later granted a further piece of land being called Otutaupuku, and being situated near the sand hills across the river at the northern end of the Opotiki Borough.

This last piece of land was later handed over by Ka and her brothers to the WHAKATOHEA tribe, of which they were members. The old Maori meeting house used to stand where Mrs Graham's house is, and it was called "Tukaki". That was the reason for the Government giving this piece of land, on account of its nearness to the meeting house.

Before Volkner's murder, there was a grain-grinding mill near the site of the present Opotiki Dairy Company's factory, near the stream known as "Mill Stream". This probably accounts for the stream being known to this day as Mill Stream. However, it was destroyed as a reprisal, by the soldiers after Volkner's murder...

- From "Opotiki News", 10 Dec. 1969.

Cont'd: An incident during the short, sharp engagement at Rangioawhia which reflects no credit upon the soldiers concerned but which enraged the chivalrous officers occurred when a tall old man, clothed in a white blanket which he was holding over his head, emerged from the doorway of a burning whare. His upstretched arms showed he had a weapon, and he advanced towards the crescent of troops in surrender facing a hundred level rifles. "Spare him, spare him!" shouted the nearest officer. But the next moment there was a thunder of shots. Staggering from the bullets, the old hero recovered his poise for a instant, stood still with an expression of calm, sad dignity, then swayed slowly and fell to the ground dead. The episode enraged St. H. a young officer of the General's staff, so much so that he pointed to a soldier of the 65th Regiment and shouted, "Arrest that man, I saw him fire!" But Leveson-Gower, the captain of the detachment, replied, "No, I'll not arrest him; he was not the only one who fired."

I have endeavoured to set the record straight regarding this Rangioawhia affair as various garbled excuses have been offered as to why some sections of WHAKATOHEA, inflamed by the HauHau 'doctrine' brought in from the Taranaki, turned on their erstwhile priest and brought about his tragic death.

Ed., HISTORICAL REVIEW.